

## Sermon: Pentecost 20: 2021

Earlier this year our monthly book group read John Grisham's "The Testament." In it an incredibly wealthy, very elderly, big business man committed suicide and left a will which was controversial in that most of the wealth was to go to an illegitimate granddaughter who was a missionary somewhere in the Amazon rain forest. The many family members, all dysfunctional had already decided how their expected inheritance would be spent. It was an interesting story even if very far-fetched!

Have you ever had unexpected inheritance money or not had what you expected? How did you feel? The two situations would be different of course. When my father died there were tangible gifts for my two siblings but money for me. My brother insisted I gave a third to my mom and another third to my sister. As the gift was unexpected and I wanted family peace I did just what he requested. Sadly, though, shortly after that he fell out with my sister about a financial situation and they never spoke again until my mother died twelve years later. Money can cause difficulties and that was what we heard in today's Gospel.

But inheritance can mean things other than inheriting wealth. In today's Gospel the rich young man (I assume young as **he ran up** to Jesus) wanted help from Jesus. His wealth and all it brought with it was not giving him what he wanted, the assurance he could inherit eternal life. He obviously knew that this was something his wealth could not buy, but Jesus, the man who spoke of God, would know the answer. From the Gospel reading you learned he was a devout Jewish man who kept the Ten Commandments, at least the ones concerning his relationship with people. But it seems he knew that was not enough. Eternal life did not mean then or does it mean now how things will be in the next life, after your time on earth has ended but your whole life, all the time, now and forever. It is your relationship with God. This man who was rich did the right things, kept the commandments because he knew he had to. Jewish law said so and he was a good Jewish man. But he did not have a deep relationship with God. He saw in Jesus a man who did. So, he wanted to know about that. The Gospel reading told us that Jesus loved him. We are not told why Jesus loved him, but we can only think that he was someone who Jesus felt could be a good disciple as his heart was in a good place. But Jesus could see that his wealthy life style prevented him from forming a deep relationship with God. The love of his life was his wealth. Jesus told him to give it all away. But the man could not do that. His wealth was even more important to him than his wish for eternal life. Money for this life superseded his wish for eternal life now and in the next life. Wealth in this life was more important than his relationship with God. He had a security in money we understood. What a choice! St. Paul thoughtfully wrote, "The love of money is the root of all evil." Sadly, he was the only person whom Jesus called and whom we know about who walked away. Jesus healed many people but never invited any of them to join his team. In fact, when a man who had been possessed by demons was healed by Jesus and asked if he could join Jesus team, Jesus told him to go and proselytize, spread the good news of what God had done for him. Jesus did not invite him to join his team of disciples.

It seems the disciples saw what had taken place and wanted more information. They had long understood from scripture that a wealthy man must be one who was doing the right things and whom God loved. They also understood that if someone was poor or sick, they had done things which displeased God and were being punished. The Jewish authorities taught wealth was positive. This instruction of Jesus that the wealthy man should give away everything he had and once he had done

that he could join Jesus team must have come as a complete surprise. You need to remember that none of them had been asked to relinquish possessions, this was the first time Jesus mentioned it that we know about. But it must have shocked the listening disciples. If wealth was a deterrent how did a wealthy person get into heaven? Jesus repeated that the lure of wealth was a distraction for humans. So, for you today, living in NJ. Your wealth is huge, compared with the poverty in much of the world. However, you must remember that Jesus said that despite the challenge you have in terms of entering heaven as a relatively rich person, with God nothing is impossible. Jesus saw in that young man a desire to have a deep and lasting relationship with God. But he lacked one thing; he was too connected to his wealth. Is there one thing or possibly several things that you know separate you from God? It does not have to be wealth but it could be. To what do you give all your time money and energy? What is the most important thing in your life? This is for you to think about today. The thing or things that separate you from following and serving Jesus may prevent you from having a life that is full of the joy of serving Christ. Again, being rich, having many possessions is not necessarily a bad thing. But there is a difference between you possessing things which you use in good ways and all these things possessing you! You may already know that wealth and possessions can prevent you from deepening your relationship with God.

Also, there is a warning in St Luke's Gospel. Jesus told the story of a beggar called Lazarus who sat outside a rich man's home in desperate squalor. The rich man never noticed he was there. When the rich man died, he went to hell, not because he had done anything wrong but because he had not ministered to Lazarus in his poverty and extreme need. In other words, he committed sins of omission rather than sins of commission. But Lazarus went to heaven because he had suffered in this life so was given an abundance of love in the life after death. It's a chilling reminder of the need for you to help those in need.

This week we heard from Dave Sullivan that many families from Afghanistan have been processed and can leave Fort Dix. They need a place to live and jobs for those able to work as well as people willing to offer help with rides, house hold items, tutoring, and other needs as time goes on. If you have a few hours of time in the next few weeks maybe this is what God is calling you to do, to be a part of one of the helping teams. There is that challenging statement in the letter to the Hebrew's you heard read today, "but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account."

Wealth can mean many things. People have subjugated the poor forever it seems. The Prophet Amos saw the corruption of his time and spoke out against it. That was nearly 3000 years ago. Things are no better today. Our book group just finished reading NY Times journalist Rick Bragg's book "All over but the shoutin.'" In it he described two visits he made for work to Haiti. He reported what he saw; that the violence and the corruption was just appalling. The powerful and wealthy were killing, maiming, threatening all those who tried to oppose their ruthless regime. Those chapters were sickening. I was horrified to learn that people who had escaped from the atrocities they had experienced there and had gone to live in S America and then had made another decision to try to make a home in the US had recently been taken back to Haiti. Haiti is do deprived and depraved; I am terrified as to what will happen to them. These people, all people need a safe country, need a homeland that can protect them and where they can live in safety and in peace. How and when that will ever happen in Haiti are huge questions.

Back to you - where are you with Jesus teaching today? Does his teaching on wealth challenge you, frighten you, worry you? The good news is that Jesus loved that young man and did not stop loving him even if he refused Jesus invitation. Jesus will love you whatever you do and however you respond to his call. Certainly, thinking of ways to help people and to share the abundance of what you have is important. October is stewardship month at Messiah, the month when you are encouraged to think about how you will give of yourself to God in thanksgiving for all God has given to you. You should have received an email from me reminding you of this. Later in the month you will receive financial information and a reminder that the first Sunday in November is our Ingathering Sunday when we all complete pledge cards for next year. Also, this month several people will tell you in their own words, "What Messiah means to me" I hope you will thank each one of them for their dedication and willingness to serve in that capacity.

I close with more words from the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, **"Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need."** Amen

Hebrew's you heard read today, **"but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account."**